**UNIVERSITY OF KENT**

# In Search of Merjamaa: Volunteering as a Means of Revitalizing the Meryan Heritage of Central Russia

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**Abstract**

This master`s dissertation deals with voluntary activity as a means of sustaining the neo-Meryan movement of Central Russia. The movement aims to revitalize ancient Finno-Ugric Meryans` cultural heritage by practicing cultural philanthropy. Local studies, publishing, and art projects are the principal forms of neo-Meryan activity which reflects the ideals of the ethno-futurist cultural movement.

The neo-Meryan movement comprises a heterogeneous group of volunteers. Therefore, the study approaches neo-Meryan activity as a form of capital. Pierre Bourdieu`s theories on symbolic, cultural, and social capital provide the theoretical framework of the study. The study shows that these types of capital are closely intertwined in the activity of the movement. The Meryan cultural heritage lives in cultural archetypes which constitute a source of symbolic capital. These archetypes are charted out by means of local studies, and art projects provide a way of reproducing them. However, the culturological comprehension of these archetypes is what makes one to volunteer for the Meryan cause. This comprehension is the precondition of those symbolic exchanges which turns individual voluntary initiatives into social capital.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that local studies as a type of grassroot organisational activity can effectively contribute to the post-Soviet Russian civil society. The interest in Central Russian inhabitants` Meryan habitus shows that the local can be a source of cultural capital. This habitus, manifested in local religious practices and beliefs, lays the moral foundation for civil society.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1. 1 The Study

The study deals with voluntary activity as a means of sustaining the neo-Meryan movement of Central Russia. The neo-Meryan movement comprises a diverse set of individuals, associations and aspirations with a common aim to preserve and revitalize the Meryan heritage of Central Russian oblasts. Meryans, a Finno-Ugric people, inhabited the current Vladimir, Kostroma, Ivanovo, Yaroslavl and Moscow oblasts until the 17th century. Collecting and distributing information about Meryans is an important activity for neo-Meryans. However, the ideological background provided by ethno-futurism, a cultural tendency taken shape in former Soviet republics, is a distinctive feature of the movement.

The study aims to find out how grassroot voluntary activity in local studies contributes to Russian cultural philanthropy and to Russian civil society in general. An essential hypothesis of the study is that local studies as voluntary activity are able to bind together local voluntary initiatives and pervasive ongoing processes of a cultural or a social nature. Moreover, the study approaches local studies as a field in which the Russian third sector can co-operate with public and private sectors. The active cooperation of different sectors is not only a typical feature of Russian philanthropy, but it also enables the creation of social and cultural capital necessary for developing Post-Soviet civil society.

The studies concentrating on these Russian non-governmental organisations often focus on political questions, aiming to chart out the general atmosphere of Russian civil society. Moreover, Western organisations often serve as a yardstick when their Russian counterparts are observed. Thus, the number of active members and the volume of philanthropic giving set

the criteria of appraisal. However, such an approach does not adequately take into account the distinctive features of Russian non-governmental activity.

By so far, there seems to be no research on local studies as a field of Russian grassroot civil society activity. This study aims to fill this gap in research. Ever since the 19th century local studies have constituted an important form of Russian voluntary activity, and local studies associations were among the few non-governmental organisations which were able to operate during the Soviet years. Therefore, they reflect the nature of Russian philanthropy and the state of Russian civil society in general.

**1. 2 The Research Design**

The neo-Meryan movement is founded on unofficial organisational activity with a heterogeneous set of participants. This fact guides the choice of research questions, theory and methods. The movement and its aims can be approached from the perspective of capital. Therefore, the research questions are:

1. What is the role of volunteering in the construction and maintaining of the modern Meryan identity?

2. What forms of symbolic and cultural capital does the neo-Meryan movement enhance in order to demonstrate and revitalize the Meryan heritage?

3. How does neo-Meryan volunteering create social capital in order to make influence on Russian society?

The chapter 2 explains the theoretical framework of the study. Here, attention is paid to the research theory. Moreover, the chapter puts the neo-Meryan movement in the context of a grassroot local studies organisation. The chapter 3, for its part, explains the chosen research methods, and this is also where a description of observed thematic categories is given. These categories guide the approach to the research data: 447 texts published in the Merjamaa Internet site. The question is about a web portal run by the Metsa Kunnta association, an unofficial civil society organisation concentrating on Meryan history and culture.

The chapter 4 approaches the artistic dimension of the neo-Meryan movement. The influence of ethno-futurism in Meryan art projects is illustrated here, and the chapter also observes the Meryan field as a market of symbolic goods with the reproduction of Meryanness as a strategy. The chapter 5, for its part, deals with Meryan publishing activity. Publishing is approached as a way of distributing symbolic capital, and also as a means of creating new types of connections between volunteers and the private sector.

The chapter 6 observes local studies as a form of activity which mirrors the individual nature of neo-Meryan volunteering. The Meryan soil of Central Russian oblasts is seen as a source of symbolic and cultural capital. In order to chart out these forms of capital, the thematic analysis of the research data is expanded here. Moreover, this is where Meryanness is approached as a habitus which links the past to the present.

### 1. 3 Research Ethics

In order to mitigate risks to individuals, human participation in the research was limited to the minimum. Therefore, the study is primarily founded on written material. However, because

the study deals with neo-Meryan volunteers and their activity, these volunteers were given an opportunity to comment on the research questions and findings. The neo-Meryan activists` comments were taken into account when the written data were approached and the research findings were dealt with.

The selection of activists to comment on the research questions and findings was carried out by means of the snowball method. An information leaflet including the research questions was sent to the moderator of the Merjamaa portal. He was asked to forward the leaflet to other activists of the movement. Together, four activists commented on the research questions. When the data analysis was completed, a summary of the research findings was sent to these four activists. Both the information leaflet and the summary were written in Russian in order to avoid misunderstandings. One of the activists commented on these findings.

Each four activists were asked for a request of informed consent. The activists were free to withdraw from the research project at any stage of it, and their comments were anonymised. Also the people appearing in the written research material were fully anonymised. Moreover, the access to the texts published in the Merjamaa portal was open, and it did not require one to log in to the website. Therefore, analysing these texts did not create any ethical issues.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2. 1 Previous Research on the Neo-Meryan Movement

Some studies have already been written about the neo-Meryan movement. D. A. Kaunov (2017) approaches the movement as an aspiration towards one`s own ethnic past. According to Kaunov, the tendency towards a new ethnic-cultural identity in the spirit of the Finno-Ugric world can be observed in ancient Finno-Ugric peoples` historical territories. A distinctive feature of this pursuit is an attempt of returning vanished elements of cultural memory into the sphere of modern culture. (Kaunov 2017, pp. 82 – 83.)

Similarily, P. A. Skrylnikov in his study considers Meryan identity as an intellectual reconstruction which hardly relies on an indigenous Meryan tradition. Instead, Russian people`s culutral heritage lays the foundation on which a new Meryan identity is constructed. Skrylnikov distinguishes three dimensions in the Meryan movement. The first of them, a local dimension, has to do with Meryan people`s historical territories whereas the second, a religious dimension, is manifested in attempts of revitalizing ancient Meryan religion. The third dimension, an ethno-futuristic art project, is about trying to adapt the activists` vision of the Meryan heritage into the modern world. (Skrylnikov 2016, p. 101.)

Timur O. Galkin in his study (Galkin 2013) approaches the neo-Meryan movement as a regional phenomenon in which identity is searched through the culture and beliefs of Central Russia`s lost tribes. According to Galkin, the question is about ”an emerging new vector of the regional worldview”. Galkin also observes a similar process of deconsolidation elsewhere in Russia and Europe. However, Galkin warns to consider neo-Meryan activism as separatism. Instead, the search of a new identity through lost tribes is a symptom of “a deep

system crisis”. The Russian people has become tired to ”the imperial mission” which has been maintained for five hundred years. This explains the pursuit of going back to roots. (Galkin 2013, pp. 264 – 265, 267.)

### 2. 2 Research on Ancient Meryans

A. E. Leontyev provides an interesting approach to Meryans in early historical sources. Leontyev observes the context of the Getica, the first historical source on Meryans written by the Byzantine historian Jordanes in the middle of the 6th century. The work includes a list of tribes among which `Merens´ (Meryans) are mentioned. Leontyev pays attention to the fact that Jordanes puts Meryans before the Mordva, an another Finno-Ugric people, in his list. In other words, Jordanes locates Meryans to an area which is further south than the one mentioned by later Russian chronicles. This indicates that Jordanes may have referred to Meryans` original home in the western bank of the Oka river. According to Leontyev, Russian chronicles were written more than hundred years after Jordanes` time, and they locate Meryans to the area of Nero and Pleschevo lakes. This may be a result of a Meryan migration to an area which is more suitable for agriculture. (Leontyev 1996, pp. 19, 21.)

In her article (Ahlqvist 1992) Arja Ahlqvist approaches the Finno-Ugric substrate in the toponyms of Yaroslavl Region. According to Ahlqvist, Central Russia and a part of Northern Russia were inhabited by Finno-Ugric peoples before the arrival of Slavic population. The current Yaroslavl, Kostroma and Ivanovo oblasts were inhabited by Meryans, and there were also Meryans in Vladimir and Moscow oblasts. A Finno-Ugric influence can be observed in the dialects and toponyms of Central and Northern Russia. Ahlqvist points out that there is no certainty about the pace at which Meryans assimilated into Slavs from the 10th century

onwards. Nevertheless, the perpetuation of substrate toponyms requires prolonged and ongoing contacts between indigenous inhabitants and settlers. (ibid., pp. 1 - 2, 4.)

In his work O. B. Tkachenko approaches Meryan language. According to Tkachenko, the problems in the reconstruction of the Meryan lexicon have to do with the definition of boundaries between Meryan and other Finno-ugric words. Tkachenko points out that it is doubtful whether a lexeme belongs to an indigenous Meryan lexicon or to the set of loan words received from an another language relative. Moreover, a lexeme may be a result of an another Finno-Ugric people`s migration to the areas inhabited by Meryans. In this case, the lexeme does not belong to the Meryan lexicon at all. (Tkachenko 2007, p. 89.)

### 2. 3 The Cultural Background of the Neo-Meryan Movement

Ethno-futurism is the ideological background of neo-Meryan thought. Lena Gottelier describes the expansion of ethno-futurism in her article (Gottelier 2017). According to Gottelier, ethno-futurism proliferated from Estonia to the areas of small Finno-Ugric nations of the former Soviet Union. At the same time, the movement became diversified and localized, and it modified itself to suit different purposes. Along Gottelier, ethno-futurism is against ethno-preterism which considers certain cultural forms as original and which aims to conserve them in their ”genuine” form. (ibid., pp. 25 – 26.)

Elvira Kolcheva, for her part, observes ethno-futurism from the perspective of archetypes. According to Kolcheva, cultural archetypes are an ethnic-national phenomenon. The re-actualization of ethnicity is an important tendency in the post-Soviet situation. Thus, actualizing a cultural archetype is about incorporating cultural habits into new historical

realities. By doing so, it is also possible to project the future. According to Kolcheva, this is ”the deep sociocultural idea of artistic processes”, and it can be observed in Finno-Ugric ethno-futurism (Kolcheva 2015, pp. 255, 257.)

The research literature of this study includes two articles about the current situation in Russian cultural life. E. V. Savenko`s article deals with samizdat, ”an unregistered, self-imposed, non-commercial periodical press with a small circulation” (Savenko 2016, p. 89). Lev Jakobson, Elena Koushtanina and Boris Rudnik, for their part, deal with the Russian nonprofit cultural sector in their article (Jakobson, Koushtanina, Rudnik 2000). These articles provide a framework for the observation of the neo-Meryan movement as a form of cultural philanthropy. Moreover, Ildikó Lehtinen`s article on Finno-Ugrism as a social representation (Lehtinen 2008) helps to set the events organized by neo-Meryan activists in the context of ethno-futurism.

**2. 4 Local Studies**

Local studies constitute an important field of neo-Meryan voluntary activity. The movement applies methods and practices which are similar with those applied by local studies activists elsewhere in the world. Therefore, going through an appropriate body of literature on local studies is necessary.

Peter H. Reid and Caroline Macafee give a good overview on local studies as voluntary activity (Reid, Macafee 2007). According to Reid and Macafee, local history has always tended to be the pursuit of educated amateurs whereas professional historians or sociologists

find the local interesting only within a larger context. However, as society becomes more individualistic, people want to pursue their own investigations, and the entry of ordinary people into history democratizes the subject. (ibid., pp. 127 – 128.)

According to Reid and Macafee, three factors constitute ”a tripartite paradigm of local studies”: the intricacy of the sources, the complexity of the investigations, and the enthusiasm of the users”. Therefore, librarians and archivists are ”the gatekeepers to local history”, because they have a role in encouraging good practice in research. (ibid., pp. 128 – 129.) This theme is also present in John Mac Ritchie`s article on local studies blogging (Mac Ritchie 2012). According to Mac Ritchie, a weblog is one of local studies librarian`s most effective tools. Namely, it enables to make significant and even worldwide of what for a long time was ”kept locked up in filing cabinets or display cases”. (ibid., p. 89.)

There are several ways of approaching the local environment. In their article (2012) Michael P. Marino and Margaret Smith Crocco introduce four of them. The article introduces a four-step model for analyzing a community as a historical resource. According to Marino and Smith Crocco, the first step is to look for the events that happened in the community. The second step is to identify the particular themes which are appropriate to understanding a community`s history. The third step is to concentrate on the people who have settled within a particular community whereas the fourth step is to look at the buildings as documents offering an insight into history. (ibid., p. 233 – 237.)

D. S. Lihachev`s article `Local Studies as Science and as an Activity´ served as a manifesto for Russian and Soviet local studies activists for a long time. According to Lihachev, local studies are a comprehensive science which combine in itself information on natural sciences,

history and art research. However, local studies require a caring attitude towards the research subject, and as such they serve as ”a patriotic activity aiming to raise the intellectual level of home region”. According to Lihachev, local studies do not have two separate levels for specialists and the general public. Local studies only exist when the general public understands them and takes part in them. (Lihachev 2007, p. 159 – 160.)

### 2. 5 Green Grassroot Organisations

The existing research on  Russian grassroot civil society organisations set the framework of this study. Laura A. Henry` s article on Russian grassroot green organisations is especially important. According to Henry, “a narrow assessment of environmental organizations` relative strength or weakness along the standard criteria for civil society development overlooks an increasingly diverse sector of green activism”. The total number of Russian environmental organisations, their geographical dispersal throughout the country and their increasing professionalism indicate the development of “a vibrant sector within civil society”. (Henry 2006 a, p. 211.)

According to Henry, grassroot leaders rely on like-minded networks of family, friends, colleagues or parents in order to carry out their programs. Most of these groups are not membership-based. They do not rely on membership fees, and recruiting new members is not crucial for them. Grassroot organisations carry out environmental education programs, but they also engage in other local projects. Henry points out that the projects sponsored by these organisations have a ”largely apolitical nature”. Thus, ”an effort to resolve local problems through practical activism” is a common feature of grassroot groups. (ibid., pp. 214, 218 – 219.)

In her article `Shaping Social Activism in Post-Soviet Russia: Leadership, Organizational Diversity, and Innovation´ (Henry 2006b) Laura A. Henry pays attention to the resources provided to Russian environmental organisations. Due to the impoverishment of citizens and a lack of charitable giving in Russia, society does not significantly fund environmental movement organisations. Therefore, according to Henry, organisational leaders "seek resource providers and allies who possess a worldview or logic of appropriateness similar to their own". Henry points out that grassroots environmental leaders commonly mention "enthusiasm and optimism" as their greatest resources. (ibid., pp. 100, 104, 106, 114.) Henry`s article helps to approach the financial preconditions of neo-Meryan activity.

## 3. DATA AND METHODS

### 3. 1 The Data

The data comprise 447 texts published in the Merjamaa web portal (http://merjamaa.ru) which is the principal information channel of the Meryan community. The data include all texts published in the portal between April 2010 when the website was founded, and April 2012. Moreover, the data include all texts published between the years 2013 – 2015 and in the year 2018.

The sampling method of the study is founded on the principles of theoretical sampling. Thus, interpretative theories are built from the emerging data, and new samples are selected to examine and elaborate on this theory (Marshall 1996, p. 523). The decision to sample data from different unbroken timelines is made in order to increase the validity of the study. Validity refers to the issue of whether an indicator that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept (Bryman 2016, p. 158). The data analysis shows some variation in the frequencies of the observed thematic categories between different timelines (see Appendix 1). Therefore, meaningful categories may only be created within the framework of a diachronic observation.

The timelines April 2010 – March 2012, 2013 – 2015 and 2018 were chosen in order to achieve a representative sample. The data saturation was reached during the data analysis when similar themes emerged repeatedly from different texts. Therefore, timelines standing for different phases of the neo-Meryan movement were chosen for observation. The timeline April 2010 – March 2012 covers the first two-year period of the Merjamaa portal whereas the timeline 2013 – 2015 stands for its middle phase. Finally, the time period 2018 mirrors the current situation of the neo-Meryan movement. This is the most recent whole year

period which can be observed in its entirety.

### 3. 2 The Research Method

An essential research method in the study is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition used in content analysis whereby themes that emerge from the data become the categories for analysis (Roberts, Dowell, Jing-Bao Nie 2019, p. 1). The study applies a Russian doll approach in which the data are first classified into a set of general thematic categories. In practice this involves a thematic classification of the texts published in the Merjamaa portal. At this stage the focus is on the frequency of different themes, because this provides an overview of neo-Meryan activity.

The next stage is to divide the observed general themes into thematic sub-categories. This enables a detailed approach to volunteering, the essential theme of the study. The process involves the identification of themes which are relevant to the research focus, the research question, the research context and the theoretical framework (Roberts, Dowell, Jing-Bao Nie 2019, p. 1). At this stage it is possible to analyze the emerging thematic sub-categories in relation to the research theory. The themes emerging from the research data stand for different types of capital defined by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1979, 1980), either social, symbolic or cultural. Therefore, the frequency and type of different thematic categories exposes those forms of capital which are present and enhanced in the voluntary activity of the neo-Meryan movement.

The thematic analysis of the research data is carried out along the principles of descriptive statistics. Thus, the number of units which belong to a thematic category emerging from the

data is clearly expressed. This method increases the reliability of the study. Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept (Bryman 2016, p. 157). Therefore, a well described qualitative methodology utilizing some components of quantitative frameworks makes research open to critique (see Roberts, Dowell, Jing-Bao Nie 2019, p. 2).

### 3. 3. 1 The Thematic Categories

The texts published in the Merjamaa portal between April 2010 and March 2012, between 2013 and 2015 and in 2018 can be classified into ten thematic categories:

1. An introduction of a current issue: # 111
2. An introduction of a place or a region: # 104
3. Cultural features: # 55
4. The presentation of material: # 35
5. A portrait of a person: # 34
6. An ethnic group: # 26
7. A religion or a cult: # 26
8. Linguistics: # 26
9. Archeology: # 22
10. A cultural era: # 8

The category `An introduction of a current issue´ is the most numerous of all categories. This category comprises various subcategories (see Appendix 2), but what is common for them is the relative topicality of the themes they involve. This topicality makes these subcategories important when approaching the activity of the neo-Meryan movement. The subcategories `Local studies excursions´ and `Auto tours´ include articles dealing with the local studies activity of the movement. The texts under the categories `Art and cultural exhibitions´ and `Festivals´, for their part, illustrate ethno-futurism which is the cultural framework of neo-Meryan activity. Moreover, the subcategory `A new publication´ occasionally include information about books published by the Meryan activists.

The thematic category `An introduction of a place or a region´ includes articles which observe a particular place or a region from various perspectives. The articles under this category are normally founded on a local studies excursion or a set of excursions which have taken place well before the article was written. The local studies activity of the neo-Meryan movement can be approached through these articles. Also the thematic category `The presentation of material´ is important when observing the publishing activity of the movement.

### 3. 3. 2 The source of texts

The texts published in the Merjamaa portal can also be classified in terms of their original source or genre (see Appendix 3). A local studies blog can be ”a collaborative effort, swirling around a central topic” (Mac Ritchie 2012, p. 89). Therefore, the Merjamaa portal is a platform in which it is possible to publish texts from various sources.

In most cases (# 269) the texts published in the Merjamaa portal are written by the activists themselves. The category `An academic article´ (# 53), for its part, include texts which are either published in an academic publication or are written by someone whose academic status is mentioned in the text. Moreover, these texts follow established academic principles in their parse and style. The category `A text from the media sources´ (# 55) include texts which are first published in a newspaper, a journal or in a television or a radio channel.

Together 31 articles published in the Merjamaa portal were first published in the webpages of different information projects. Especially the Finno-Ugric information portal `Finugor´ and the Meryan art portal `Merya Mir´ were important web sources. Moreover, 19 texts were originally published in the webpages of other civil society organisations whereas 17 texts

were published by public institutions. Here, the question was about the official information channels of the state administration, oblasts and municipalities. Finally, three of the texts published in the Merjamaa portal were first published in a travel blog.

The original source or genre of a text published in the Merjamaa portal was taken into account when different thematic categories were chosen for observation. A high share of texts written by a local studies activist indicates that a particular thematic category is an outstanding example of neo-Meryan volunteering. In the thematic category `An introduction of a place or a region´, for example, 74, 04 percent of articles were written by an activist whereas the highest share of articles written by an activist, 88, 57, can be observed in the category `The presentation of material´.

The share of articles written by an activist was remarkably lower in other thematic categories. In the categories `An ethnic group´ (50 percent), `A portrait of a person´ (51, 43 percent), `Cultural features´ (53, 57 percent) and `A religion or a cult´ (56 percent) only around a half of the articles were written by an activist, and the lowest share of articles written by an activist could be observed in the category `Archeology´ (14, 29 percent). The relatively low share of articles written by activists influenced the decision to exclude these categories from analysis.

Moreover, the category `A cultural era´, despite of a high share of articles written by an activist (62, 50 percent), was excluded because the number of articles (8) it includes is quite small, and thematically this category is close to the category `An introduction of a place or a region´. The category `An introduction of a current issue´, for its part, was chosen for

analysis. Although a relatively small share of articles in this category was written by activists (58, 56 percent), the category is a heterogeneous one, and the articles chosen for analysis were mostly written by activists.

### 3. 4 The Research Theory

The study is founded on Pierre Bourdieu`s theories of social, cultural and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, social capital is the entity of those current or potential resources which lie in institutionalized networks. In other words, social capital is about belonging to a group which is brought together by permanent and beneficial relationships. (Bourdieu 1980, p. 2.) Cultural capital, for its part, can be defined as property which has turned into being, an essential part of a person (Bourdieu 1979, p. 4). Thus, the question is about the habitus, a tendency of behavior which turns the essential, socially constituted characters of a person into a solid lifestyle (Bourdieu 1998, pp. 150 - 151). Finally, symbolic capital stands for any quality which becomes symbolically effective when being observed by social actors with suitable means of observation and appraisal (ibid., p. 165).

The essential aim of the study is to find out how volunteering creates cultural and symbolic capital in order to reproduce the Meryan heritage. Therefore, Bourdieu`s article of cultural and social reproduction (Bourdieu 1971) provides a good approach to the theme. According to Bourdieu, the accumulated legacy which is inherited from past generations only belongs to those with an ability of adopting it. Thus, receiving a message and achieving the culturally organized competence which is necessary for receiving it are submissive to the same laws. This leads to a circle in which cultural capital ends to cultural capital. (ibid., p. 47, 53.) The presupposition of the study is that Meryanness as a form of social capital is tightly intertwined

with the creation of cultural capital necessary for adopting a Meryan identity.

## 4. MODERN MERYANNESS IN ART AND CULTURE

### 4. 1 Ethno-Futuristic Art Exhibitions

The research data include 11 articles about art exhibitions organised by the activists of the neo-Meryan movement (see Appendix 2). As a form of voluntary activity, Meryan art projects bring together different sectors of society. First, art projects may be carried out by clubs when the question is about volunteering in a traditional sense. Second, professional artists may organise these projects without pay. In this case, the question is about serious leisure in which significant personal effort is based on specially acquired knowledge, training or skill (Stebbins 1992, p. 6). Namely, professional artists volunteer for the Meryan movement, and Meryanness offers them a source of inspiration.

An essential artistic vision or an idea which unites the core members of the neo-Meryan movement is ethno-futurism. In the neo-Meryan movement ethno-futurism manifests itself in art exhibitions. Art exhibitions constitute an important means of introducing the Meryan movement as well as ethno-futurism to the general public. For example, in December 2018 two neo-Meryan activists organized an art exhibition called `A Meryan`s Measurement´ in Saint Petersburg. During the exhibition one of them described ethno-futurism as ”an universal instrument in preserving our people`s culture under the living conditions of the global world”. Thus, ethno-futurism offers a strong foundation for self-knowledge. (Merjamaa 2 January 2018.)

Art exhibitions also serve as a way of combining theory and practice. For example, in May 2014 a neo-Meryan activist presented an art exhibition as a part of `The Night of the Museums´, an event which was organised at the Art Museum of Ivanovo Oblast. The aim

of the exhibition was ”to understand the sacral symbolics of the Upper Volga region which stems from the Meryan people, well known from chronicles and annals”. (Merjamaa 19 May 2014.) The sacral symbolics of the Meryan people have to do with the cultural archetypes which play an important role in ethno-futurism.

According to E. M. Kolcheva, a cultural archetype is ”an effective analytical toolkit of ethnic-national art, reflecting ethnic-cultural processes in itself”. To a great extent, an archetype consists of completed, representative cultural forms and symbols which have taken shape in the course of history. In national art an ethnic-cultural archetype primarily maintains the fundamental elements. Therefore, cultural archetypes expose their content in an iconic, illustrative way. Along Kolcheva, archetypes can be actualized by incorporating them into new historical realities. (Kolcheva 2015, p. 254).

The aim of incorporating archetypes into new realities was visible in the art exhibition `Lege artis´ which was opened at the art museum of Cherepovets in September 2018. At the exhibition archaeologs, designers and artists presented both ancient and modern jewelry worn by the inhabitants of The Upper Volga region. According to the article published in the Merjamaa portal, Lege artis offered ”a new format of communication with the archaeological collections – by means of art and the universal language of fashion”. (Merjamaa 23 September 2018.) The question is about cultural reproduction.

**4. 2 Reproducing the Meryan Heritage**

Art exhibitions have a close connection to the local studies activity of the neo-Meryan movement. Local studies serve as a means of collecting information about Meryan culture.

Especially the content category `An introduction of a place or a region´ include articles about Central Russian local cultural features. These cultural features can be reproduced by means of modern art.

As a good example serves the project `International Vladimir´ which was carried out in The Vladimir Oblast Youth Library in 2015. As a part of the project, `The Week of Finno-Ugric Culture´ was organized in the end of September. `The Rarog´, a Vladimiryan club of historical reconstructions, took part in the theme week. The club is specialized in reconstructing Meryan and Muromean items of Early Middle Ages. At the event, the members of the club offered visitors an opportunity to see reconstructions of ancient clothing and jewelry. (Merjamaa 6 October 2015.)

Meryan art projects have a radical attitude towards the local or the indigenous. The established norms of cultural representation are criticized in an article published in the Merjamaa portal in June 2014. The article is founded on a previous article published in a scientific journal. In the article, a philosopher-culturologist presents his opinions on the absence of local cultural memory in ”the historical nucleus of Russia”. According to the philosopher, a paradoxal peculiarity in Russia is that the culture of a small town does not exist as a local entity. The situation in Russia is ”a passive reproduction of the Soviet situation”. Along the philosopher, the Soviet cultural project was founded on an idea of rationally organized culture, and even today, along the Soviet scheme, everything starts from the top. (Merjamaa 25 June 2014.)

The neo-Meryans` approach to local culture is opposed to the from top to bottom approach. Design projects aiming to create new brands to Central Russian towns and cities stand as a

good example. The article published in the Merjamaa portal in February 2012, for instance, deals with ”an art project of designers who came freely together on Facebook”. According to the article, the art project ”gave birth to a whole bunch of logotypes of the brand and significance of the name Moscow”. A designer participating in the project pointed out that one has to find ”the nucleus” of the city when creating a symbol for it. For the designer, this nucleus had to do with ”a Meryan town”. (Merjamaa 15 February 2012.)

Similarily, the photographic art project `Yaroslavl´ in Yaroslavl presented ”the work, lifestyle, freetime, thought, and worldview of Meryan society and a Meryan individual”. According to an article about the project (Merjamaa 17 September 2013), the cultural comprehension of design and art focusing on an urban milieu is extremely important, and it does not only involve the planning of existing and future objects. It is also important to analyse those processes which have to do with the complex influence of an urban milieu in an individual living in its sociocultural sphere.

The article highlights the cultural comprehension of design and art. This comprehension of local or Meryan archetypes and symbols is the key issue in transferring Meryan heritage to the general public by means of art. The question is about transferring symbolic goods which, according to Pierre Bourdieu, are ”a two-faced reality, a commodity and a symbolic object” (Bourdieu 1984, p. 3).

According to Pierre Bourdieu, the field of production of symbolic goods owes its own structure to the opposition between the field of restricted production and the field of large scale cultural production. The field of restricted production is a system producing cultural goods for a public of producers whereas the field of large scale cultural production is

for the production of cultural goods destined for the non-producers of these goods, ”the public at large”. (Bourdieu 1984, p. 4.)

The neo-Meryan movement, aiming to promote the Meryan issue, has to deal with these two fields. Like the article `The Cultral Archeology of the Meryan Myth´ points out, Meryan identity is about ”embedding ancient myths in the environment of modern culture”. The article leaves this task of ”reconstructing and manifesting” the Meryan myth to philosophers, local studies researchers, historians and artists. (Merjamaa 27 December 2011.) Their task is to turn signs back into symbols wtih a connection to the mythical beginning. On one hand this requires making the ancient Meryan culture comprehensible to the general public, but on the other hand a certain amount of insider knowledge is needed to understand ”the regional Meryan cultural logics” (ibid.) enabling a contact to the Meryan past. Here, festivals play an important role.

### 4. 3 Festivals and Performances

The research data include six articles dealing with festivals or performances (see Appendix 2). All these festivals and performances are founded on voluntary activity. Festivals serve as a way of recruiting volunteers. Thus, they can be attractor events designed to engage the attention and short-term involvement of larger number of volunteers (McCurley, Lynch, Jackson 2012, p. 126). For the neo-Meryan movement this is principally about arousing interest in the Meryan issue. Being founded on loosely structured activity with a heterogeneous group of activists, festivals offer a way of bringing together peer groups. The question is about brokered volunteer recruitment in which the recruitment efforts are boosted by connecting with other groups which provide volunteers for community efforts (ibid., p.

117). Thus, the example of these groups may inspire potential new volunteers.

Festivals serve as a way of gathering together social capital necessary for maintaining and developing the neo-Meryan movement. Social capital is about belonging to a group which is brought together by permanent and beneficial relationships (Bourdieu 1980, p. 2). However, an essential challenge for the movement is to present Meryan themes, in particular those with an ethnographic nature, to the general public in a meaningful and understandable way. The question is about representation. Festivals can be seen as living ethnographic museums. According to Henrietta Lidchi, ethnographic museums ”produce certain kinds of representations and mobilize distinct classificatory systems which are framed by anthropological theory and ethnographic research”. Thus, there is a conflation between the physical presence and the meaning of objects. (Lidchi 1997, pp. 161 – 162.)

Producing representations of Meryans requires creativeness. This is because Meryans were a Finno-Ugric people, and as a concept ”Finno-Ugric” is rather obscure. According to Ildikó Lehtinen, Finno-Ugrism lives as a vision, as an imaginary reality, because Finno-Ugric peoples have always lived in a multinational area. Therefore, Finno-Ugrism is a social representation which includes a community`s interpretations of the world. Therefore, representations interpret social memory. (ibid., p. 172.)

Along Lehtinen, language, collective memory, tradition and a story of a common origin are the essential criteria of national culture. Tradition is present in the postmodern world. However, tradition changes, and it requires perpetuity. (p. 175.) Also the neo-Meryan movement needs a way of keeping tradition alive. This is where festivals come to the picture. As an activity a festival lives and changes, and it is present in the action of postmodern time

(ibid., p. 175).

The article `Bylinnyj Bereg. Young Merya´ (Merjamaa 5 August 2013) gives a good description of a festival as a postmodern way of transferring cultural traditions to the future generations. The article deals with the Bylinnyj Bereg 2013 festival organized in Kimr in July 2013. The question is about an international festival of Early Middle Ages historical reconstructions. The essential themes of the festival were the culture and tradition of the ancient Russian realm as well as the Finnic, Baltic, Slavic, and Scandinavian peoples of the 9 – 11 centuries. Around six hundred reconstruction makers participated in the festival.

The festival program was characterized by entertainment and interactivity. The program of the festival included shows, reconstruction makers` presentations, artisans` master classes, popularised lectures on archaeology and a jousting performed by a reconstruction club (ibid.). It is to be noted that the strength of festivals lies in the possibility of interactivity and participation. Appealing to all senses, festivals, especially folklore festivals, constitute a noteworthy alternative to museums, because museums only appeal to the sense of sight (Lehtinen 2008, p. 176).

Festivals provide a representation of Meryanness, but more is needed to turn Meryanness into a believeable identity in today`s postmodern world. Ethnic identity is a dimension of symbolic capital, an observable form of being (Bourdieu 1998, p. 167). The potential Meryan identity has to be imitated, and here performances organized by neo-Meryan activists offer a potential solution.

In 12 June 2013 `Bratstvo Lesa´ (The Metsa Kunnta association) organized a performance in

Tver as a tribute to the Day of Russia. The performance was organized in cooperation with the `Tverzha´ and the `Vyatichkij Les´ associations. According to the article `Ethno-futurism is Patriotism´ (Merjamaa 13 June 2013), “the creative youth” from Tver, Shatura, Kostroma, Kaluga and Rjazan participated in the performance in order to ”commemorate the ancient tribes which constituted the foundation of Russian state”. As a part of the performance nine spiritual masks were presented. They stood for the nine tribes of ancient Russia.

The performance introduced spectators with nine ritual masks, standing for ancient Russian tribes. Masks play an important role in neo-Meryan performances and festivals. For example, the article `Meryan Ethno-Futurists from Moscow Were Reborn as Spirits in Latvia´ (Merjamaa 14 February 2013) deals with the participation of the Metsa Kunnta association in The International Festival of Traditional Masks in Latvia. This annual festival is organized by The Latvian Association of Folklorists, and it aims to popularize Eastern European traditional masks. During the festival, the members of the Metsa Kunnta association presented ”an interactive lecture and a video show about the theme `The Tradition of Ritual Masks in the Upper Volga Region´.

According to the lecture presented in the festival, each human being has a role in his or her life. However, this role presents only a part of the world. Everyone chooses a particular role, but no one can play several roles at the same time. Nevertheless, one would like to visit in an another person`s role, and by recognizing this transpersonality in himself or herself, one becomes deeper and richer and able to multiply his or her force. (ibid.)

As a concept, ´the mask´ chrystallises an essential feature of the neo-Meryan movement. Namely, `the mask´ can be seen as a symbol of representation. On one hand it can serve as a

transpersonal gateway, enabling one to step from an identity to another. On the other hand, like a neo-Meryan activist`s comment to the research question shows, belonging to a certain social, national, professional, linguistic, political, religious or racial group is about wearing a mask while one`s true self remains unclear (Comment 25 April 2019). The neo-Meryan voluntary activity is largely about serious leisure for which ”self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, recreation or renewal of self” are characteristic (Stebbins 1992, p. 7).

According to Pierre Bourdieu, the social world can be presented as a space constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation and distribution. Agents and groups of agents are defined by their relative positions within that space, and one can not occupy two opposite regions of it. Bourdieu points out that agents construct the social world by constructing its view. This happens through representation. Thus, agents constantly perform in order to impose their view of the world and of their own position in it. According to Bourdieu, this position is their identity. (Bourdieu 1985, p. 723 - 724, 727.)

Maintaining a Meryan identity requires constant representation. Neo-Meryan activity is, in accordance with Bourdieu`s vision, about constructing the social world by constructing its view. However, this does not solely involve art exhibitions and performances, but also a particular lifestyle in general. Here, an essential way of differentiation and distribution is volunteering for the Meryan cause.

## 5. SHARING INFORMATION

### 5. 1 Publishing

Producing and publishing material about the Meryan theme is perhaps the most important type of voluntary activity for the neo-Meryan movement. As such, the movement reflects the changes which have taken place in the field of local studies during the last decades. As new web 2.0 tools were developed, local studies librarians realized the possibilities, and it is possible to create even worldwide interest in what was ”kept locked up in filing cabinets or display cases” for a long time (Mac Ritchie 2011, p. 89). The neo-Meryan movement applies several Internet media channels, including the Merjamaa and the Merya Mir portals, and a Facebook as well as a vKontakte accounts. Moreover, many of the neo-Meryan activists have a private webblog dealing with the Meryan issue.

Publishing material about the Meryan theme happens through many channels. The most productive of them is the Merjamaa portal in which new texts are published on a regular basis. However, more voluminous texts are also published in an Internet library which works alongside the Merjamaa portal. Together, the research data include 7 texts published in electronic form in the Merjamaa Internet library and one text published in an another Internet library. Also the Pajwa webshop is attached to the portal, and it is where printed books can be purchased. The research data include two announcements of a book available in the Pajwa. Moreover, there is one announcement of a printed book which can be bought from an individual person. Finally, one book can be bought from a bookshop which is specialized in selling self published books or books with a small number of copies.

Many of the publishing projects are very ambitious of their nature. The research material

includes two articles of printed books which are published by the Merja Press, a name given to Meryan activists` own publications. The Merja Press stands for modern day samizdat publishing.

### 5. 2 Samizdat

A good description of modern day samizdat is given by E. V. Savenko (2016). Savenko defines samizdat as ”an unregistered, self-imposed, non-commercial periodical with a small circulation”. According to Savenko, samizdat survived in post-Soviet Russia despite of the broadened sphere of information. The reforms of the early 1990s resulted in changes in publishing, and the state monopoly of this activity was abolished. However, only those publishing structures which receive economic support were able to survive in the new circumstances. Therefore, economic independence constitutes a significant limit to the freedom of publishing. (Savenko 2016, p. 89.)

According to Savenko, frustration towards official media is the reason why samizdat has survived. What attracts the literati to self publishing is the need of self expression which official publishing activity can not satisfy. Nevertheless, as a distinction to its predecessor, the 21st century samizdat does not manifest itself as a significant social phenomenon. Instead, it is limited to a local circle of readers. (ibid., p. 89 – 90.)

Also the neo-Meryan publishing activity has to do with self-expression. This can be seen in an article presenting a Meryan dictionary (Merjamaa 27 March 2013). According to the article, the Metsa Kunnta association was able to release “an explanatory Meryan dictionary of a maximal integrity” after a three year process. The dictionary includes toponyms and

onomastics of the Upper Volga region and Meryan words from those Russian dialects and argotic languages which are spoken by the inhabitants of Kostroma, Vladimir, Ivanovo and Yaroslavl oblasts.

The dictionary approaches Meryan language through toponyms and dialects. An indisputable Finno-Ugric influence can be observed in the dialects and toponyms of Central and Northern Russia (Ahlqvist 1992, p. 1). However, problems in the reconstruction of the Meryan lexicon system have to do with the definition of boundaries between Meryan and other Finno-ugric words (Tkachenko 2007, p. 89.) An attempt of revitalizing Meryan language is quite ambitious, and the feedback given to the new dictionary was not completely positive. According to an article published in the Merjamaa portal in 2014, professional linguists looked down on the vocabulary published by The Merya Press. However, this did not bother those who participate in the project. Namely, the Meryan vocabulary became so popular ”among the enthusiasts of history and culture” that its final number of copies exceeded the original one by thirty times. (Merjamaa 31 December 2014.)

Voluntary publishing activity may serve as a means of distributing symbolic capital. According to Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic capital is any quality which turns symbolically effective. This calls for social actors with suitable categories of observation and appreciation. (Bourdieu 1998, p. 165.) Like the example shows, there was a demand for a Meryan vocabulary among ”the enthusiasts of history and culture” although professional linguists were not able to appreciate it. Thus, samizdat publishing can be seen as a protest against official academic scientists without an ability to appreciate the Meryan theme.

Moreover, producing and distributing books with an alternative nature can be seen as a protest

against the prevailing situation in Russian book market. Here, voluntary publishing activity and the private sector may effectively cooperate. This can be observed in the business idea of an alternative Muscovite bookshop through which a book dealing with Mescheran history could be purchased. The article informing about the book (Merjamaa 30 August 2011) includes a link to the website of this bookshop specialized in selling ”uncommon books with a small number of copies, the publications of the capital city and provinces”, and ”the unofficial literature of different factions” (Russkaya Derevnya 2011).

The business idea of the bookshop is an ideological one. According to it, an essential problem of distributing rare books with a small number of copies is that these books do not often end up to shops. Moreover, the business idea also speaks out about the situation in today`s book market:

> ”So what is this value of books and how does it correspond with their price? When you search the price of any not overly uncommon book with a search engine,- - you will easily find out that our price is lower than the average price in the Muscovite market. The essential reason for this is that the Muscovite market are not free. The extremely high prices (preventing the normal sale of books) have taken shape and keep on taking shape as a result of a ”particular” relationship between wholesalers and biggest retail stores.”
>
> (Russkaya Derevnya 2011.)

The business idea reflects the problem in Russian publishing presented by Savenko: economic independency constitutes a limit to the freedom of publishing (Savenko 2016, p. 89). However, the problem here is in the monopoly status prevailing in Russian book market. The former state monopoly of the Soviet era has been replaced by a new one sustained by private market. Therefore, samizdat may create an alternative sphere in which volunteers and alternative private enterprises come together. The question is about social capital. Here, belonging to a group stems from relationships which are founded on economic and symbolic exchanges (Bourdieu 1980, p. 2). The nature of these exchanges can be observed in the ways

of financing samizdat.

### 5. 3 Financing Samizdat

Samizdat publishing does not only set intellectual challenges. Namely, releasing a self-publication requires money. In the case of the Meryan dictionary the number of editions was one hundred copies, and the author of the Meryan dictionary carried out the project on his own expence. The price of a dictionary was set to 300 rubles, and it could be bought from the Pajwa webshop. (Finugor.)

The research data does not indicate the existence of any systematic fundraising models applied by Meryan organisations. The Merjamaa Internet portal neither includes a bank account number for donations nor any petition for them. In addition, there is no mention about membership fees in the portal. In this sense the Metsa Kunnta association, for example, is a typical Russian grassroot organisation. These organisations do not rely on membership fees in their activity (Henry 2006, p. 214).

According to Laura A. Henry, grassroot groups require less financial support than professionalized or government affiliate groups do, because they do not need to maintain office space, staff, or technology. Instead, volunteer workers and in-kind donations along with occasional small grants and money from city and regional administrators enable the survival of these organisations. (Henry 2006b, p. 114.) The research data seems to support Henry`s observations. The neo-Meryan organisations apply similar methods in financing their activity. The functional principle of the Pajwa webshop run by the Metsa Kunnta association is a good example.

The article `The Amulets of Pajwa – The Northern Ethnos´ presents Pajwa, “the first Finno-Baltic shop”, to readers. According to the article, Pajwa aims to ”collect and systematize archaeological, cultural, historical and ethnographic material of Balts and Finns, two ancient neighbors and the greatest ethnos of East Europe”. (Merjamaa 8 April 2013.) Moreover, the article explains the pricing policy of the shop in a following way:

”Our fundamental goal is not business. The principal aim is to – tell people about the ancient culture of their ancestors. Therefore, we tried to make prices maximally low. The pricing policy of ”PAJWA” aims to make prices comfortable and reasonable for everyone who is interested in his own ancestors`heritage.”
(ibid.)

According to Jakobson, Mersiyanova and Efremov, the Russian legislation does not require nonprofit organisations to have a board of trustees. Moreover, it does not mention limits of liability for such a board. It is mandatory for organisations to report of their work to governmental bodies, but preparing public reports is voluntary. Jakobson, Mersiyanova and Efremov point out that more than a quarter of those organisations which present reports of their work do not include any information on financial sources. Organisations working on culture and recreation report on financial sources least often. (Jakobson, Mersiyanova, Efremov 2012, p. 8, 10.)

It is plausible to assume that the income which is received by selling products through the Pajwa shop is only used to cover the production costs. However, a fundraising method like this requires great accountability from activists. Therefore, like Jakobson, Mersiyanova and Efremov point out, when talking about abuse or misconduct inside a nonprofit, ”not only legal infringement is implied, but also disregard for its mission, and self-interested behavior”. Thus, the temptation to transform a non-profit organisation into a for-profit one is curbed by the leader`s personal accountability to his conscience and his colleagues. (ibid., p. 12.)

## 6. LOCAL STUDIES

### 6. 1 The Individual Nature of Local Studies Activity

The thematic categories `An introduction of a place or a region´ (# 104) and `An introduction of a current issue´ of the research data provide information about Meryan local studies activity. The subcategories `A local studies excursion´(# 26) and `An auto tour´ (# 6) of the last-mentioned category deal with local studies (see Appendix 2). Together, the research data include 136 articles about the theme.

Most (# 108) of the articles dealing with places or regions were founded on material collected by neo-Meryan activists, either by an individual person or by a small group of local studies enthusiasts. Thus, the question is about individual volunteering which is carried out as an individual with no host organisation or collective endeavour (Ellis Paine, Hill, Rochester 2010, p. 19). This reflects the individual and democratic nature of local studies activity. As society becomes more individualistic, people want to pursue their own investigations (Reid, Macafee 2007, p. 127 – 128.)

Also the neo-Meryan activists who commented on the research questions of this study confirmed the individual nature of local studies activity. Two of them pointed out that Meryan activity is founded on private initiatives (Comment 5 March 2019; Comment 24 April 2019). The other two activists did not explicitly refer to private initiatives in neo-Meryan activity, but they stressed the importance of sharing private observations in social media and other information platforms (Comment 25 April 2019; Comment 29 April 2019). All four activists mentioned local studies excursions or ethnographic expeditions as a form of neo-Meryan activity.

In the activists` case volunteering has a character of serious leisure in which enthusiasts are more obliged to engage in their pursuits than are their less serious counterparts (Stebbins 1992, p. 5). In this sense neo-Meryan activists differ from tourists carrying out local studies excursions. Together, nine of the articles dealing with these excursions had to do with tourism. Three of them were first published in a travel blog (see Appendix 3). The article published in the Merjamaa portal in June 2014, for example, was written by "an editor in chief and a part-time local studies researcher and a tourist". The article also includes a link to a travel blog kept up by the journalist. (Merjamaa 25 June 2014.) The travel blog, for its part, aims to "entertain a reader with travel news and to invite him to an auto tour" (Za Granyu Budnej).

Moreover, six articles published in the Merjamaa portal dealt with auto tours (see Appendix 2). For example, in November 2011 an article about an off-road vehicle tour was published in the portal. The tour was organized by the There in Russia club which aims to "awake interest in the historically significant places and monuments of our ancient time, to distribute information about them to the broad layers of the population and in this way to enable their popularization, research and potential reconstruction" (Merjamaa 11 November 2011).

Volunteering may have a conceptual implication of leisure. Thus, volunteers are thought to get involved out of self-interest, and focus is on "the enjoyment and satisfaction that volunteers gain from their involvement". (Ellis Paine, Hill, Rochester 2010, p. 28.) However, even off road vehicle tours and travel articles may have a far reaching cultural or social purpose. The There in Russia club, like the example shows, aims to distribute information about cultural monuments. Moreover, like Henry (2006, p. 218) has observed, some Russian grassroot green organisations aim at developing environmental tourism. Also Kaunov in his study on the neo-Meryan movement sees modern Meryanness as a way of attracting tourists to Central Russian

areas (Kaunov 2017, p. 83).

Together, seven articles dealing with local studies were scientific articles (see Appendix 3). Also scientists and students may participate in local studies excursions. In the summer 2015, for example, ”an integrated interregional archeological and scientific-intellectual excursion” was organised in the Upper Volga region. During the excursion scientists, students and postgraduate students conducted research on the archeology and ecological state of the region, and they also observed local inhabitants` biological diversity. (Merjamaa 6 August 2015.)

A scientific project like this may not necessarily stand for volunteering. However, there are occasionally volunteers participating in ”scientific-intellectual” excursions led by scientists. The article published in November 2018, for example, deals with “an inter-regional scientific-practical conference dedicated to the archeological excavations in the Unoroch hillfort. According to the article, the excavation project included an educational program, and the scientific community, students and volunteers became interested in it. (Merjamaa 6 November 2018.) An another article about the Unoroch excavation project (Merjamaa 5 September 2018) mentions that there were twenty volunteers participating in the project, and they came from many Russian towns.

It is to be noted that local studies may also be a professional activity. Eight articles dealing with places and regions were first published in media sources and five in the information channels of public institutions (see Appendix 3). Here, the question is not about volunteering. However, voluntary local studies enthusiasm may influence in the other sectors of society. For example, in 2014 the state-owned tv-channel Kultura approached neo-Meryan activists in order to make a tv-documentary about the movement (Comment 5 March 2019). This shows

that local studies as a form of activity is able to gather social capital.

### 6. 2 A Thematic Approach to Local Studies Excursions

The research material dealing with places and regions provide little explicit information about local studies as a form of volunteering. However, it is possible to approach volunteering from a thematic perspective by taking a look at those themes which appear in the articles dealing with places and regions. In fact, this approach mirrors Meryan volunteers` own vision of their activity like the following comment presented by a neo-Meryan activist suggests:

> "Voluntary activity – it is what emerges from free will. Passes from heart to heart, is transmitted gently, lasts without effort. It is a sort of internal, spiritual impulse which brings people together. It is willingness to know more about the soil you live on. About the people who lived here before you, about what they did, about what they believed in. To understand the knowledge and experience they gathered, and to use it in everyday life."
>
> (Comment 25 April 2019.)

The activist considers voluntary activity as "an internal, spiritual impulse" which "lasts without effort". Moreover, for him volunteering means "willingness to know more about the soil" one lives on. Thus, the soil can be approached as a mirror of an individual`s aspiration towards volunteering. This idea stems from a long tradition. According to Elena Hellberg-Hirn, Russian self-identification has two primary sources: the body and the territory. These two are also essential metaphors. The terrain of the body includes as well Russian folklore as the spiritual terrain which is made up by language, art, and Orthodox Christianity. The territory, for its part, is a common soil which is hardened by continuous use. (Hellberg-Hirn 1998, pp. 6 – 7.)

The Western definitions of philanthropy often highlight an understanding in which an individual, through his or her voluntary deeds, contributes to his or her community. Thus,

“philanthropic activity involves a choice about how to join public needs with private commitments in a way that is both beneficial for others and satisfying for the giver” (Frumkin 2006, p. 81). The neo-Meryan vision of volunteering turns this understanding upside down. The question is not about a volunteer contributing to his or her community through activity; it is about the community contributing to activity through volunteers. And in this case the community can not exist without Merjamaa, the Meryan soil.

### 6. 3 Defining the Thematic Categories

According to Peter H. Reid and Caroline Macafee, there are three paramount factors in local studies: the intricacy of the sources, the complexity of the investigations and the enthusiasm of users. Investigations are often multidisciplinary, and they involve a multitude of different approaches. Therefore, local history investigations “can encompass every permutation of topic, place and time”. (Reid, Macafee 2007, p. 128, 130.)

Unlike other texts published in the Merjamaa portal, the articles focusing on a place or a region include many themes. Thus, it is difficult to classify these articles in terms of their principal theme. This is why a different classification method was applied to articles dealing with places or regions. Each article was read carefully through with an aim of charting out all themes it included. After this, these themes emerging from the data were classified and labeled in a meaningful way. As a result, the following fifteen thematic categories could be defined:

1. History (# 57)
2. Sanctuaries (# 54)
3. A Region (#38)
4. Linguistics (# 36)
5. A religion or a cult (# 30)
6. Historical monuments (# 28)
7. Archeology (#27)
8. Villages and population centers (# 27)
9. Legends and beliefs (# 25)
10. Towns or cities (# 20)
11. Architecture (# 19)
12. Lifestyles (# 16)
13. A cultural era (# 15)
14. Livelihoods (# 15)
15. Local incidents (# 9).

However, classifying the articles about places and regions into these thematic categories is not enough. Observing how these categories are interconnected tells more about volunteers` relationship to the local (see Appendix 4). The list of thematic categories shows that there are two voluminous thematic categories: `History´ (# 57), and `Sanctuaries´ (# 54). Both these categories gather their own spheres of themes. Namely, the themes `History and `A Sanctuary´ appear in a same text only 19 times. Instead, the other themes tend to gravitate towards one of these principal thematic categories. This shows that there are differences in the approaches which writers choose to the concept of locality.

Therefore, the mutual interconnectedness of different thematic categories was charted out (see Appendix 4). This was done by observing which themes were simultaneously present in the same article. First, attention was paid to the number of interconnected categories. The average number of thematic interconnection was 5, 14, and the standard deviation was 5, 06. Therefore, the cases of thematical interconnection which exceeded the interval determined by the standard deviation were considered as outstanding examples of thematic interconnection. This was the case if a theme appeared in the same text with an another theme more than 10 times.

However, also to the share which a given thematic interconnection had of an another thematic category was taken into account. The average share was 19, 03 percent, and the standard deviation was 15, 56 percent. Thus, if a case of thematic interconnection had a share of 35 percent or more of a given thematic category, the question was about an outstanding example of thematic interconnection. The most obvious cases of thematic interconnection were chosen for observation. Moreover, Michael P. Marino`s and Margaret Smith Crocco`s (2012) four-step local history model offered a methodological framework for approaching these cases.

### 6. 4. 1 The Sphere of History and Linguistics

The thematic category `History´ is most often interconnected with the category ´Linguistics´. Together, these two themes appeared in the same text 22 times. A good example of the connection between history and linguistics is an article published in the Merjamaa portal in December 2010. The article introduces readers to the Galich town in Kostroma Oblast by giving a detailed description of its history. According to the article, scientists consider the Unoroch hillfort, situated northwest from today`s Galich, as an administrative center of local Meryans until the 10th century. Along the article, Meryan language was used in the area until the 18th century. Moreover, the fishermen of Galich used a professional sociolect with a Meryan lexicon until the 20th century, and there are several Meryan toponyms in the Galich area even today. (Merjamaa 6 December 2010.)

The Meryan toponyms and words in the local sociolect witness the Meryan history of Galich. Thus, toponyms may be approached as an objective form of cultural capital. In its objective form cultural capital can be transferred in its material frame (Bourdieu 1979, p. 5). Therefore, only a look at a toponym in a map is enough to expose the Meryan origin of Galich.

However, the symbolic capture of this objectified form requires cultural capital (ibid., p. 5). As a form of cultural capital, toponyms may be measured in terms of their cultural bond to those ecologies where they appear and where they are used (Nash 2013, p. 120).

This approach takes place in an article published in the Merjamaa portal in November 2010. The article deals with the Meryan history of Kostroma town. According to the article, the area of Kostroma has been "the symbol of Russian backwardness and eternal peace" for a long time. Unfortunately, "the Soviet flat iron crossed over the town in every direction", and the current domestic policy of Moscow is turning local people into grey mass. Therefore, one who wants to know "the hidden truth about Russia" has to begin his or her search from Kostroma which is a part of ancient Meryan areas. According to the article, the name `Kostroma´ may, by analogy with the current Mari language, be interpreted as `Kus – oto – ma´ which stands for `The Land of Holy Groves´. Moreover, a look to the map of the borderland between Kostroma and Yaroslavl oblasts reveals many villages with a Meryan name. (Merjamaa 29 November 2010.)

The article speaks out against the centralization policy of Moscow which, like the Soviet era, has a destructive effect on Kostroma. However, the Meryan history of the town becomes visible in toponyms, not only in the name of the town itself but also in those of the villages around it. Thus, the area of Kostroma consitutes an ecology to which Meryan toponyms have a cultural bond. This is what their cultural capital stems from.

### 6. 4. 2 History and Towns

Like the above-mentioned examples show, towns are the sphere where an interconnection between history and linguistics can be observed. The thematic category `History´ is even more generally interconnected with the category `Towns and cities´. Together, these categories appeared in the same text 16 times.

The article `The Non-Slavic Life of Muscovian Posad´ (Merjamaa 14 September 2015) aims to offer "an interesting trip to Finno-Ugric Moscow". Along the article, Moscow as a settlement was born long before the year 1147. Archeologists have found a Finno-Ugric hillfort in Kremlin. The two hundred inhabitants of the fort were people of the Djakovo culture. Unlike Indo-Europeans, they knew how to melt iron. Therefore, the Fatyanovo people "hit their stone and bronze axes" against the Finno-Ugric ones which were made of iron. (ibid.)

The article puts a lot of attention to action. Due to their technical progressiveness, ancient Finno-Ugrians could beat their enemies. The article adopts an "it happened here" approach to local history in which wider historical events are given a local or a regional context (Marino, Smith Crocco 2012, p. 234). Thus, despite of their unquestionable merits, ancient Meryans could not resist the expansion of Kievan Rus of which the establishment of Moscow in 1147 stands as a witness.

The "it happened here" approach to local history is relatively basic, and it does not call on to use higher-order thinking or practice the skills associated with historical inquiry (Marino, Smith Crocco 2012, p. 235). However, the article takes this fact into account. According to the

article, local studies researchers, toponym researchers and historians make the history of Russian capital more comprehensible to the general public (Merjamaa 14 September 2015). Therefore, pedagogic aspects play an important role in local history. Local history as a science exists only when the general public participates in it and understands it (Lihachev 2007, p. 159).

### 6. 4. 3 History and a Region

The articles about places and regions show strong interconnection between the themes `History´ and `A Region´. Together, these themes appear in a same article 17 times. Observing history in connection with a region stands for a thematic approach to local history in which historical themes and concepts help to understand the broad factors that have shaped and defined life (Marino, Smith Crocco 2012, p. 235). A good example of this approach is an article published in the Merjamaa portal in February 2018. The article deals with the monastery colonisation of Central Russia. The article is written by a scientist, but the text includes several comments made by a neo-Meryan volunteer.

According to the article, the monastery colonisation of "Merjamaa" took place after the Mongol invasion of 1237 – 1240. Monasteries were placed by important water routes. Moreover, they were strengthened with pole walls which were necessary in order to carry out military operations. According to a comment made by a neo-Meryan activist, these operations stood for colonisation. In his comment to the text the activist claims that the range of monasteries and churches in Central Russia is biggest in the area where vanished peoples like Meryans used to live. However, these peoples became "the foundation of Great Russian Ethnos". Therefore, the activist quotes Fyodor Dostoyevsky`s phrase: "A Russian is an

Orthodox", and he reminds that Orthodoxy is a cultural or an ethnic religion in the history of the Russian state. (Merjamaa 6 February 2018.)

The article presents Orthodoxy as a denominator of Russian ethnic identity, because Orthodoxy is an ethnic and a cultural religion. Ethnic identity is an observable form of being which either works as positive or negative symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1998, p. 167). In this case the question is about negative symbolic capital. The Orthodox mission happened through colonisation, and fortified monasteries stand for militarism. Colonisation was a negative process which lasted for centuries. It is a wide theme through which one can focus on the "big picture" and think about how historical events have impacted the life he or she lives (see Marino, Smith Crocco 2012, p. 236).

### 6. 5. 1 Sanctuaries

Sanctuaries make up the second largest thematic category of the articles dealing with places and regions. Together, 54 of the articles deal with this theme. In her study on Russian grassroot environmental organisations Laura A. Henry pays attention to the pursuit of environmental spirituality which is present in the activity of these associations. Some of the organisations observed by Henry aim at improving people`s quality of life through contact with nature (Henry 2006, p. 218). To a certain extent a similar tendency explains neo Meryan activists` interest in nature sanctuaries. This can, for example, be seen in an article dealing with an excursion to ´The Blue Stone´ (Merjamaa 27 December 2010), a locally known sacred stone in Yaroslavl oblast.

According to the article, a strong interest in the sacral and "unofficial" history of humankind

awoke during the last decade of the 20th century. This interest results in the search and research of those natural or cultural sites which do not have an unofficial status of a "monument". According to the article, local people respect these sites, but for science they are difficult to approach. However, the difficult access to these places and their role as local monuments make it possible to preserve the integrity of habits and the longevity of their survival. (ibid.)

The article reveals some important things about the significance of local studies and volunteering as a part of them. First, there is a growing interest in "unofficial" history, becoming apparent in those cultural sites which do not have an official status. Second, for science these sites are difficult to approach. Like Reid and Macafee point out, for scholars the local becomes interesting only within a larger context (Reid, Macafee 2007, p. 127). Falling outside the established branches of science, local phenomena may only be approached by local studies volunteers.

### 6. 5. 2 Sanctuaries and Villages

Also the thematic category `Villages and Population Centers´ was often interconnected with the category `Sanctuaries´. Together, there were 14 texts dealing with both these themes. Villages provide a framework in which local people serve as a resource for historical study. Communities and people living in them can "serve as texts to be read and analyzed, and the lives of everyday people can serve as a means to deeper historical understanding" (Marino, Smith Crocco 2012, p. 236).

The article `The Flying Church of Lake Nestiar´ (Merjamaa 30 September 2010), for

example, provides an introduction of village Nestiar in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. According to the article, Nestiar is a place where “the ancient deities of the heathen Mari hover invisible”, and even today local people worship them “in the form of icons and revered trees and springs” (ibid.) The article brings out the continuum between the past and the future. Thus, time is not an a priori condition of historicity; instead, practical activity produces time in its own happening (Bourdieu 1998, p. 151).

However, a village also constitutes a milieu where traces of the past are visible. Most communities offer several layers of immigration and ethnic history to be studied, and such an analysis will lend itself to a deeper understanding of the historical forces that have influenced the movement in and out of various communities (Marino, Smith Crocco 2012, p. 236). The article `A Holy Stone in Chelohovo Village (Western Meschera)´ (Merjamaa 14 June 2010), for example, brings out the influence of Raskolnik faith in local religious practices.

The article provides an introduction of a holy stone located in Chelohovo village. According to the article, there was an another village called Gvozdna next to the current village. The first mention of Gvozdna in historical sources dates back to the 14th century. However, the village was deserted in the 18th century. After that, new settlers came to the place from the frontier of Western Meschera which was Raskolniks`, Old Believers`, traditional area. (ibid.)

Along the article, local Raskolniks preserved a lot of archaic features. Thus, when one travels in Meschera, one gets an impression that Christianity never really established there. There are “too many Stones, Holy Groves and Springs revered by people”, and local people feel drawn to “the backwater of local swamps and forests, exuding paganism”. (ibid.) The article not only brings out that there have been population movements in the past. Instead the influence of

these movements in the current way of life of the village is observed. Therefore, it is important not only to study the people who have left a community but also to analyze the people who currently reside there (Marino, Smith Crocco 2012, p. 237). This principle can be seen in articles dealing with legends and beliefs.

### 6. 5. 3 Sanctuaries and Legends

A thematic category likely to interconnect with the category `Sanctuaries´ is `Legends and Beliefs´. Together, these two themes appear in the same text 14 times. These texts are often founded on stories told by local people. Local people may give important information about beliefs associated with local cultural sites. They serve as a living memory of the nation. Thus, local people not only measure the reliability of a story observed by academic folklorists or cultural historians, but they also keep it alive. This reflects the essential idea of ethno-futurism which resists the "museumization" of culture (Gottelier 2017, p. 25).

The article `The Meryan Legend of Lake Saytan´ (Merjamaa 20 April 2011) serves as a good example of the aspiration towards living memory. The subject of the article is Lake Saytan which is situated in a previously Meryan area in Kirov Oblast. The article is written by a Meryan activist, but it includes a reference to notes written by a journalist. The journalist had carried out an interview with an elderly local inhabitant. The interview deals with the origin myth of the lake.

According to the myth, there was a troll called Saytan living in the area long time ago. The troll taunted local Meryan inhabitants by causing misfortune, dispute and anger. The Meryans, for their part, worshipped their god to whom they sacrificed horses and pillages. One night

when Saytan destroyed an oblation, Meryans lost their patience, and they chased after the troll with their bows. However, in the dawn there were only dead Meryans who were shot with their own arrows. Therefore, women began to cry, and their tears mixed with the blood of the dead. Mother Earth could not carry such a heavy load of water, and a lake took shape. (ibid.)

The fact that a local inhabitant recalls a myth like this manifests the survival of Meryan tradition. People who recall ancient legends and beliefs and even practice old rituals make it plausible to assume that there is a living Meryan culture in Central Russia. Thus, the practices and beliefs which emerged long time ago still keep on living, and this fills the gap between the past and the present. The question is about the habitus. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the habitus captures into practice the anticipation of world`s internal order and tendencies. Thus, an operator passes the immediate present by means of his or her past and by anticipating future through the possibilities which are written in the present. Thus, practical activity is what generates time. Therefore, neither time nor history are metaphysical realities in themselves. Time emerges when one proceeds to a deed or a thought. (Bourdieu 1998, p. 151 – 152.)

### 6. 5. 4 Sanctuaries and Religion

Together, 26 of the 54 articles dealing with sanctuaries also deal with religion. Thus, `A Religion or a Cult´ is the largest sub-category of the category ´Sanctuaries´. However, it is to be noted that the majority of articles with a sanctuary as a theme do not deal with religion at all. This shows that religion itself is not neo-Meryan activists` principal theme like some critics of the movement have suggested.

In his study on the neo-Meryan movement P. A. Skrylnikov distinguishes three orientations which guide the development of the movement. The first of them is regionalism which associates itself with the historical area of the Meryan tribe. The second orientation is religion, an attempt of reconstructing Meryan religion and getting closer to paganism and neopaganism. The third orientation is ethno-futurism which aims to fit Meryanness into the modern world. (Skrylnikov 2016, p. 231.) However, the observations made of the research data question the idea of three orientations. Regionalism, religion and ethno-futurism are parts of the same whole, and they all come together in the concept of archetype.

Due to the large size of the thematic category `A Religion or a Cult´, a further thematic analysis of this category was carried out. The analysis suggests that there are four numerous subcategories in this thematic category (see Appendix 5). The first of them is `The Relationship Between Heathen Faith and Christianity´ (# 18) This subcategory includes articles which deal with the influence of heathen religious practices in Central Russian Christianity. The second subcategory `Sacred Stones´ (# 18) is closely connected to this subcategory. The third subcategory is `Rituals´ (# 16) which, for its part, is interconnected with the subcategory `Symbols´ (# 15).

### 6. 5. 5 Symbols

As a subcategory, `Symbols´ is interconnected with the subcategory `Archaics and Archetypes ´ (#3). In fact, symbols constitute an observable form of archetypes in which the ethno-futuristic tendency of the neo-Meryan movement shows remarkable interest. Cultural archetypes are representative cultural forms which have taken their shape in the course of history (Kolcheva 2015, pp. 256 – 257). A good example of a cultural archetype is a galliform

which is the theme of an article published in the Merjamaa portal in May 2011. According to the article, there was a boulder called `The Rooster Stone´ in Uglich town until the 1930s. Many years ago when enemies threated the town, a gigantic rooster flew to the stone and warned townsmen by shouting three times. Along the article, there were marks of the rooster left in the stone. Similarily, stones with figures of people, animals, and birds can be seen in areas where Baltic and Finnish peoples have lived. According to the article, the Finno-Ugric peoples of Eastern Europe used to sacrifice chicken in heathen times, and even today there is a belief among the Erzya people according to which a household deity`s spirit stems from a sacrificial chicken`s blood. (Merjamaa 12 May 2011).

The article shows the connection between a local legend and an ancient, widespread religious belief. A rooster saving a town is an iconic form of a cultural archetype as are also the figures carved in stones. Charting out these iconic forms is an essential aim of local studies excursions. The interest shown to the ”blue stones” of Central Russia reflects this aim. A good example is the article `The Blue Stone in Velednikovo Village. The Istrinsky District of Moscow Oblast´ (Merjamaa 28 September 2010) which is founded on a local studies excursion.

According to the article, the epithet `blue´ may be explained in different ways. Thus, some researchers talk about a Finnish divinity `Ukko´ whose other name is `The Blue Robe´ whereas other researchers search for synonyms which sound like the Mari, Udmurt, and Komi words for `an eye´. Here, `the eye´ refers to a cup in the surface of a stone. Also the stone in Velednikovo village had ”cups” or ”marks” in its surface. According to the article, water in these cups is healthy, and it may cure illnesses. (ibid.)

Moreover, according to the article, Meryan mages used to carry out rituals. They knew the language of animals and birds, and they turned to the spirits of trees, rivers, stones and ancestors. (ibid.). `Rituals´ (# 16) make up one of the major subcategories of the thematic category `A Religion or a Cult´. A ritual may also be an observable form of an archetype which makes it an interesting theme for local studies. The article published in the Merjamaa portal in June 2015, for instance, deals with ritual and magical uses of aperture symbols. Aperture symbols are associated with the traditional mythology of motherhood and families, and they have a communicative function in a local community. (Merjamaa 16 June 2015.)

However, the article does not only deal with symbols, but attention is also paid to their use. According to the article, the youth living in the nearby villages of a sacred stone with holes used to gather around the stone in the first half of the twentieth century. Along the article, the longevity of the respect shown to the stone makes it a good example of an archetypical aperture theme. (ibid.) Thus, archetypes may also guide the lifestyle which neo-Meryan activists consider desirable. They mirror ”the unique etnos” which grows up around their serious leisure activity (see Stebbins 1992, p. 7). Here, a connection to the idea of civil society can be observed.

### 6. 5. 6 Religion and Civil Society

Together, 18 articles published in the Merjamaa portal deal with the relationship between Orthodoxy and heathen practices. Neo-Meryans aim to chart out those local religious practices which either exist even today or have vanished quite recently. These religious practices not only mirror an individual`s religious confession, but they also shape the social organisation of a community.

When approaching Orthodox faith, neo-Meryan activists bring out alternative symbols and practices which, in many cases, are older than the established ones. Moreover, these symbols and practices have been present since the very beginning of Russian Christianization. The article published in the Merjamaa portal in August 2013 serves as a good example. The focus of the article is in the relationship between Finno-Ugric heathen religion and Orthodox Christianity. This relationship is approached through Saint Stephen of Perm who aimed at baptizing the Finno-Ugric Komi people in the 14th century.

According to the article, Saint Stephen cut down a holy birch tree which the Finno-Ugric people of Perm worshipped as a divinity. He built a church to the same place. However, ”the spirits of our lands” penetrated to Christianity. As a result, holy birch trees grew again, and masses of people come to them. In each Pentecost birch trees are brought to churches, and holy springs as well as holy stones are worshipped. Thus,

”- - our ancestors`religion came to the very blood of Russian Orthodoxy.

The Finno-Ugric sacrum had to come to the sphere of Orthodox cult. Heathen Archetypes are an eternal matter, it is useless to fight against them.”

(Merjamaa 9 August 2013.)

The article brings out the syncretic nature of Russian Orthodoxy. Thus, heathen archetypes have always belonged to it, and these archetypes are manifested in today`s Orthodox practices. The aim of charting out archetypes in Orthodox Christianity reflects an ethno-futuristic interest to archetypes. For neo-Meryan activists archetypes are an important form of symbolic capital.

The neo-Meryan movement approaches Russian religion as a national phenomenon. Orthodoxy is a factor which unites Russians. However, there are local religious characteristics

which have absorbed into Orthodoxy. Like Timur O. Galkin points out in his study, ”Meryans` vision of today`s world is a return to the roots, not in the sense of Orthodoxy or urban Neopaganism, but in the thorough research of archeology, ethnography and the folksy Orthodox beliefs in Central Russian Finno-Ugric peoples´ local history”. Along Galkin, this paradigm identifies itself as well with the Russian nation as with nationalism. (Galkin 2013, p. 267.)

Nevertheless, in the context of ethno-futurism, the concept `national´ does not refer to nationalism, but the question is about the local (see Gottelier 2017, p. 28). By charting out local religious archetypes and distributing information about them, neo-Meryan activists contribute to a new type of nationalism. Like Galkin points out, Russian people is tired of ”the Imperial mission” which has been sustained for five hundred years (Galkin, p. 267). The aim of replacing the imperial mission by local nationalism has to do with the construction of civil society.

Theories of civil society implicitly rely on visions of ethical life which is inherent in each religion (Kharkhordin 1998, p. 961). Also Meryan Orthodoxy may provide ethical principles for a proper social life. An article published in the Merjamaa portal in March 2014, for example, deals with the tradition of holy trees in the Upper Volga region. According to the article, the cult of trees is a natural part of local inhabitants` traditional culture. This fact is manifested in the respect shown towards Voskresensky forest, the sacralization of which has to do with Sanctifier Silvester of Obnorsk. Along his hagiography, the Sanctifier lived in a thick grove in the end of his life. He forbade people to cut down trees there, and this forbidance passed from a generation to another. However, in the Soviet era, due to local forest industry, virtually every old tree vanished from the grove. (Merjamaa 31 March 2014.)

The article provides an example of a situation in which a religious archetype has an influence in the way that people threat their environment. A grove was a holy place in heathen times, and it had a similar status in the traditional Orthodoxy of Central Russia. Thus, archetypes are not only seen to determine an individual`s destiny but also the one of the whole society (Kolcheva 2015, p. 256). The example of Soviet forest industry shows how disastrous it is to abandon these archetypes. The results can be seen in environmental destruction, but also the religious foundation of civil society becomes jeopardized.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study shows that the neo-Meryan movement is an effective form of unofficial third sector activity, and it is capable of creating and charting out symbolic, cultural and social capital. As such, the movement can contribute to the post-Soviet Russian civil society. Moreover, the study shows that activity like this can create effective bonds between different sectors of society.

Local studies constitute the essential framework of the neo-Meryan movement. However, what distinguishes the movement from more universal forms of local studies is its artistic dimension. Like the chapter 4. 2 of this study shows, ethno-futuristic art exhibitions and design projects aim at presenting “the Meryan nucleus” to the general public. This nucleus is to be found in symbols and archetypes which are a source of symbolic capital for the neo-Meryan movement. Nevertheless, in order to become symbolic capital these symbols and archetypes need to be culturally understood. In other words they have to become symbolic commodities which can be distributed to the general public. Here, like the chapter 4. 3 shows, festivals and performances play an important role.

Festivals provide a means of cultural representation. By representation they constitute an interpretation of social memory, and they do this by constructing a view of the Meryan social world. However, this view can not be constructed without like-minded people. Festivals offer a way of gathering together individual people and organisations dealing with the Meryan issue. The question is about social capital.

The neo-Meryan movement is about social capital. In spite of its loose and heterogeneous

structure the movement is able to create promising relationships between different actors of the cultural sector. The publishing activity which the chapter 5. 1 deals with stands as an example. The Internet and the local studies blogging it enables make it possible to create an even worldwide interest in Meryans. Moreover, like the chapter 5. 2 shows, the samizdat publishing not only enables the establishment of an alternative cultural sphere, but it also offers a way of cooperation between volunteers and private cultural organisations.

The number of articles dealing with places and regions demonstrate that local studies are the most important type of activity for the neo-Meryan movement. Moreover, the chapter 6. 3 of this study shows that the neo-Meryan approach to Merjamaa, The Meryan Land, involves two major thematic categories: the category of history and the one of sanctuaries. As can be seen in the chapters 6. 4. 1, 6. 4. 2 and 6. 4. 3, the language, the towns and the regions of Merjamaa belong to the sphere of history. Especially the toponyms of the area constitute an important form of cultural capital.

However, Meryanness is not only about history. Neither does the neo-Meryan movement solely aim at revitalizing the Meryan past manifested by the ancient Meryan language. The chapters 6. 5. 2 and 6. 5. 3 dealing with sanctuaries mirror neo-Meryan activists` interest in local people. Local people stand for incorporated cultural capital. They transfer the past into the present through their habitus. Legends and beliefs reproduce archetypic local cultural features, and Central Russian villages represent a continuum of Meryanness. While towns and cities stand for the historical, the timebound, villages stand for the eternal.

The interest in the local has to do with the question about civil society. Neo-Meryan grassroot activity contributes to the establishment of a society which is founded on the free union of

people with similar ideas. However, public response to neo-Meryan activists` ideas is a theme which leaves room for further research. Moreover, local studies as a form of Russian philanthropy definitely offers an interesting topic for future studies.

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**Appendix 1. The Number and share of texts published in the Merjamaa portal**

| Thematic category | 2010 | | 2011 | | 2012 | | 2013 | | 2014 | | 2015 | | 2018 | | | Total | Total share |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | | | |
| An introduction of a current | 16 | 29,09% | 16 | 15,38% | 9 | 23,68% | 39 | 43,82% | 12 | 17,14% | 17 | 31,48% | 2 | 5,26% | | 111 | 24,83% |
| An introduction of a place o | 10 | 18,18% | 34 | 32,69% | 7 | 18,42% | 12 | 13,48% | 15 | 21,43% | 13 | 24,07% | 13 | 34,21% | | 104 | 23,27% |
| Cultural features | 5 | 9,09% | 11 | 10,58% | 4 | 10,53% | 9 | 10,11% | 16 | 22,86% | 6 | 11,11% | 5 | 13,16% | | 55 | 12,30% |
| The presentation of materia | 4 | 7,27% | 14 | 13,46% | 8 | 21,05% | 4 | 4,49% | 3 | 4,29% | 1 | 1,85% | 1 | 2,63% | | 35 | 7,83% |
| A portrait of a person | 5 | 9,09% | 6 | 5,77% | 2 | 5,26% | 7 | 7,87% | 6 | 8,57% | 3 | 5,56% | 5 | 13,16% | | 34 | 7,61% |
| A religion or a cult | 5 | 9,09% | 7 | 6,73% | 3 | 7,89% | 4 | 4,49% | 1 | 1,43% | 4 | 7,41% | 2 | 5,26% | | 26 | 5,82% |
| An ethnic group | 1 | 1,82% | 4 | 3,85% | 2 | 5,26% | 5 | 5,62% | 8 | 11,43% | 4 | 7,41% | 2 | 5,26% | | 26 | 5,82% |
| Linguistics | 4 | 7,27% | 6 | 5,77% | 1 | 2,63% | 5 | 5,62% | 4 | 5,71% | 2 | 3,70% | 4 | 10,53% | | 26 | 5,82% |
| Archeology | 2 | 3,64% | 5 | 4,81% | 1 | 2,63% | 4 | 4,49% | 3 | 4,29% | 3 | 5,56% | 4 | 10,53% | | 22 | 4,92% |
| A cultural era | 3 | 5,45% | 1 | 0,96% | 1 | 2,63% | 0 | 0,00% | 2 | 2,86% | 1 | 1,85% | 0 | 0,00% | | 8 | 1,79% |
| | 55 | 100,00% | 104 | 100,00% | 38 | 100,00% | 89 | 100,00% | 70 | 100,00% | 54 | 100,00% | 38 | 100,00% | | 447 | 100,00% |

The articles published in 2010 cover the time period between April and December. The articles published in 2012 cover the time period between January and March.

**Appendix 2. The subcategories of the thematic category `An introduction of a current issue´**

| The subcategory | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2018 | Total number |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. A local studies excursion | 11 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 26 |
| 2. Politics | 0 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 17 |
| 3. An artistic or a cultural exhibition | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 11 |
| 4. A commemoration day | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 9 |
| 5. An other actual issue | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| 6. An auto tour | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 7. A festival or a performance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 8. The release of a film, a document or a video | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| 9. A historical or an archeological exhibition | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| 10. A conservation project, online advocacy | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| 11. A plan for a museum or a memorial | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| 12. A conference | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| 13. A release of a new publication | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| 14. A new series of articles | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Total number | 16 | 16 | 9 | 38 | 13 | 17 | 2 | 111 |

**Appendix 3. The sources of texts published in the Merjamaa portal**

| The thematic categories of texts | The source of a text published in the Merjamaa portal | | | | | | | | | | | | | | The number of texts in each thematic category | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A text written by an activist | | An academic article | | A text from the media sources | | A text published in an information portal | | A text published by a civil society organisation | | A text published by a public institution | | A text published in a travel blog | | | |
| | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share | Number | Share |
| 1. An introduction of a current issue | 65 | 58,56% | 1 | 0,90% | 18 | 16,22% | 13 | 11,71% | 9 | 8,11% | 5 | 4,50% | 0 | 0,00% | 111 | 100,00% |
| 2. An introduction of a place or a region | 77 | 74,04% | 7 | 6,73% | 8 | 7,69% | 3 | 2,88% | 2 | 1,92% | 5 | 4,81% | 2 | 1,92% | 104 | 100,00% |
| 3. Cultural features | 30 | 53,57% | 18 | 32,14% | 3 | 5,36% | 3 | 5,36% | 1 | 1,79% | 1 | 1,79% | 0 | 0,00% | 56 | 100,00% |
| 4. A portrait of a person | 18 | 51,43% | 1 | 2,86% | 8 | 22,86% | 2 | 5,71% | 2 | 5,71% | 3 | 8,57% | 1 | 2,86% | 35 | 100,00% |
| 5. The presentation of material | 31 | 88,57% | 1 | 2,86% | 2 | 5,71% | 1 | 2,86% | 0 | 0,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 35 | 100,00% |
| 6. An ethnic group | 13 | 50,00% | 7 | 26,92% | 2 | 7,69% | 4 | 15,38% | 0 | 0,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 26 | 100,00% |
| 7. Linguistics | 13 | 50,00% | 8 | 30,77% | 2 | 7,69% | 0 | 0,00% | 2 | 7,69% | 1 | 3,85% | 0 | 0,00% | 26 | 100,00% |
| 8. A religion or a cult | 14 | 56,00% | 3 | 12,00% | 4 | 16,00% | 3 | 12,00% | 1 | 4,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 25 | 100,00% |
| 9. Archeology | 3 | 14,29% | 6 | 28,57% | 8 | 38,10% | 1 | 4,76% | 1 | 4,76% | 2 | 9,52% | 0 | 0,00% | 21 | 100,00% |
| 10. A cultural era | 5 | 62,50% | 1 | 12,50% | 0 | 0,00% | 1 | 12,50% | 1 | 12,50% | 0 | 0,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 8 | 100,00% |
| The total number of articles under each category of sources | 269 | 60,18% | 53 | 11,86% | 55 | 12,30% | 31 | 6,94% | 19 | 4,25% | 17 | 3,80% | 3 | 0,67% | 447 | 100,00% |

## Appendix 4. The number and share of interconnected thematic categories in texts dealing with places and regions

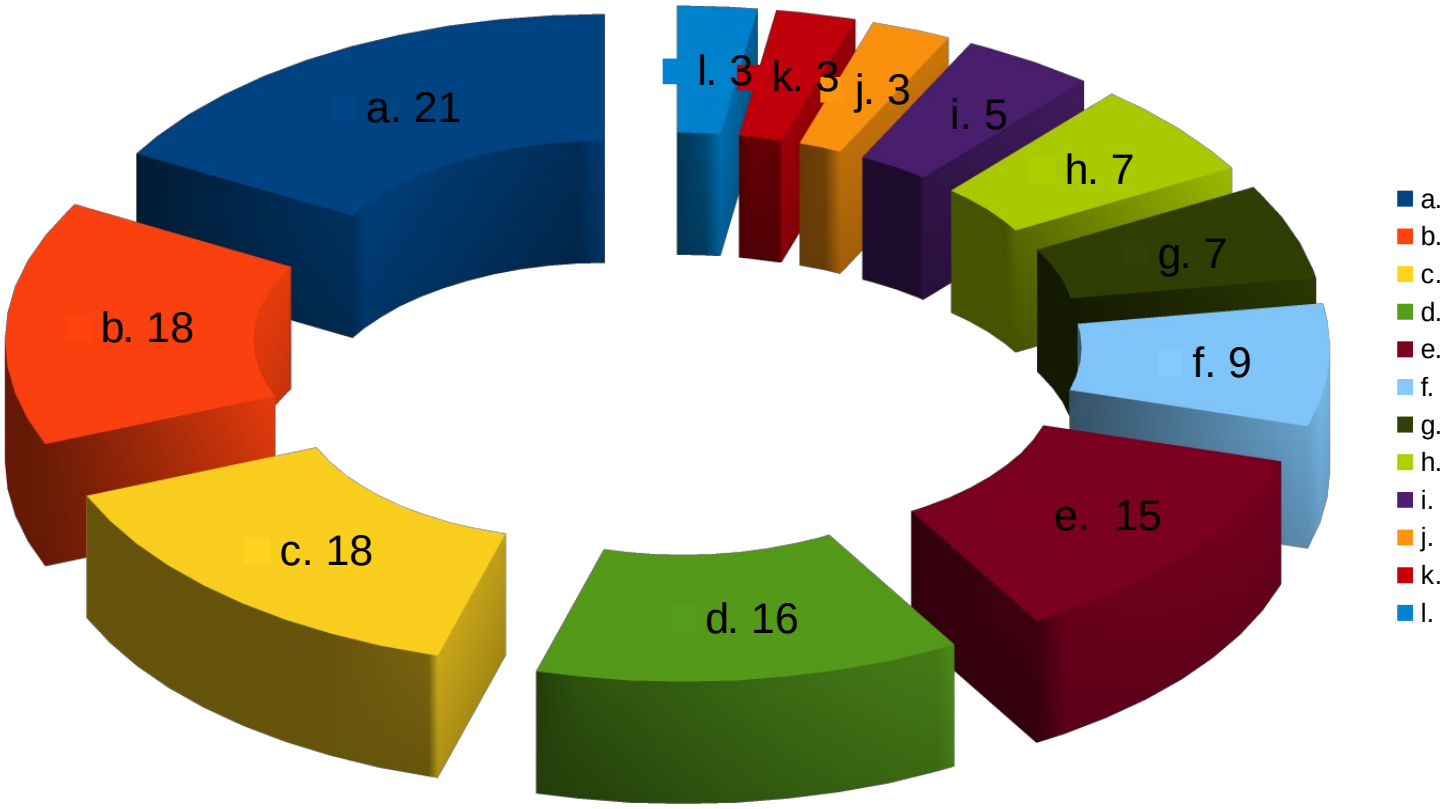
| | | History N: 57 | | Sanctuaries N: 54 | | Region N: 38 | | Linguistics N: 36 | | Religion N:30 | | Monuments N: 28 | | Villages N: 27 | | Archeology N: 27 | | Legends N: 25 | | Towns N: 20 | | Architecture N: 19 | | Lifestyle N: 16 | | An era N: 15 | | Livelihood N: 15 | | Incidents N: 9 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share | number | share |
| History | 57 | | | 19 | 35,19% | 17 | 44,74% | 26 | 72,22% | 8 | 26,67% | 10 | 35,71% | 9 | 33,33% | 12 | 44,44% | 3 | 12,00% | 16 | 80,00% | 11 | 57,89% | 5 | 31,25% | 6 | 40,00% | 8 | 53,33% | 4 | 44,44% |
| Sanctuaries | 54 | 19 | 33,33% | | | 13 | 34,21% | 7 | 19,44% | 26 | 86,67% | 8 | 28,57% | 14 | 51,85% | 9 | 33,33% | 14 | 56,00% | 5 | 25,00% | 4 | 21,05% | 3 | 18,75% | 3 | 20,00% | 2 | 13,33% | 4 | 44,44% |
| Region | 38 | 16 | 28,07% | 13 | 24,07% | | | 10 | 27,78% | 11 | 36,67% | 2 | 7,14% | 0 | 0,00% | 4 | 14,81% | 10 | 40,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 4 | 21,05% | 7 | 43,75% | 1 | 6,67% | 6 | 40,00% | 3 | 33,33% |
| Linguistics | 36 | 26 | 45,61% | 6 | 11,11% | 12 | 31,58% | | | 5 | 16,67% | 4 | 14,29% | 9 | 33,33% | 3 | 11,11% | 5 | 20,00% | 8 | 40,00% | 4 | 21,05% | 2 | 12,50% | 5 | 33,33% | 4 | 26,67% | 1 | 11,11% |
| Religion | 30 | 9 | 15,79% | 26 | 48,15% | 11 | 28,95% | 5 | 13,89% | | | 6 | 21,43% | 5 | 18,52% | 1 | 3,70% | 9 | 36,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 1 | 5,26% | 3 | 18,75% | 0 | 0,00% | 2 | 13,33% | 0 | 0,00% |
| Monuments | 28 | 10 | 17,54% | 8 | 14,81% | 2 | 5,26% | 4 | 11,11% | 6 | 20,00% | | | 1 | 3,70% | 18 | 66,67% | 2 | 8,00% | 2 | 10,00% | 6 | 31,58% | 2 | 12,50% | 0 | 0,00% | 2 | 13,33% | 0 | 0,00% |
| Villages | 27 | 8 | 14,04% | 14 | 25,93% | 0 | 0,00% | 9 | 25,00% | 5 | 16,67% | 1 | 3,57% | | | 3 | 11,11% | 7 | 28,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 1 | 5,26% | 3 | 18,75% | 4 | 26,67% | 6 | 40,00% | 2 | 22,22% |
| Archeology | 27 | 11 | 19,30% | 9 | 16,67% | 4 | 10,53% | 3 | 8,33% | 2 | 6,67% | 18 | 64,29% | 3 | 11,11% | | | 3 | 12,00% | 5 | 25,00% | 5 | 26,32% | 2 | 12,50% | 6 | 40,00% | 1 | 6,67% | 1 | 11,11% |
| Legends | 25 | 2 | 3,51% | 14 | 25,93% | 9 | 23,68% | 5 | 13,89% | 9 | 30,00% | 2 | 7,14% | 7 | 25,93% | 3 | 11,11% | | | 1 | 5,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 5 | 31,25% | 2 | 13,33% | 2 | 13,33% | 3 | 33,33% |
| Towns | 20 | 16 | 28,07% | 5 | 9,26% | 0 | 0,00% | 9 | 25,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 2 | 7,14% | 0 | 0,00% | 5 | 18,52% | 0 | 0,00% | | | 5 | 26,32% | 1 | 6,25% | 2 | 13,33% | 2 | 13,33% | 0 | 0,00% |
| Architecture | 19 | 11 | 19,30% | 4 | 7,41% | 4 | 10,53% | 3 | 8,33% | 0 | 0,00% | 6 | 21,43% | 1 | 3,70% | 3 | 11,11% | 0 | 0,00% | 5 | 25,00% | | | 5 | 31,25% | 4 | 26,67% | 3 | 20,00% | 2 | 22,22% |
| Lifestyle | 16 | 6 | 10,53% | 3 | 5,56% | 6 | 15,79% | 2 | 5,56% | 3 | 10,00% | 2 | 7,14% | 3 | 11,11% | 2 | 7,41% | 5 | 20,00% | 2 | 10,00% | 5 | 26,32% | | | 4 | 26,67% | 4 | 26,67% | 2 | 22,22% |
| An era | 15 | 6 | 10,53% | 3 | 5,56% | 6 | 15,79% | 4 | 11,11% | 1 | 3,33% | 3 | 10,71% | 4 | 14,81% | 6 | 22,22% | 2 | 8,00% | 2 | 10,00% | 3 | 15,79% | 4 | 25,00% | | | 3 | 20,00% | 1 | 11,11% |
| Livelihood | 15 | 7 | 12,28% | 2 | 3,70% | 6 | 15,79% | 4 | 11,11% | 2 | 6,67% | 2 | 7,14% | 3 | 11,11% | 2 | 7,41% | 2 | 8,00% | 1 | 5,00% | 3 | 15,79% | 4 | 25,00% | 3 | 20,00% | | | 4 | 44,44% |
| Incidents | 9 | 3 | 5,26% | 4 | 7,41% | 3 | 7,89% | 2 | 5,56% | 0 | 0,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 1 | 3,70% | 1 | 3,70% | 3 | 12,00% | 0 | 0,00% | 2 | 10,53% | 2 | 12,50% | 1 | 6,67% | 4 | 26,67% | | |

*Kuva 1: The average number of thematic interconnection is 5, 14, and the standard deviation is 5, 06. The average share is 19, 03 percent, and the standard deviation is 15, 56 percent.*

## The significantly interconnected thematic categories in texts dealing with places and regions

| Category 1 | Category 2 | The number of interconnected cases | The relative share of interconnected cases of the Category 1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| A religion or a cult | Sanctuaries | 26 | 86,60% |
| Linguistics | History | 26 | 72,22% |
| Sanctuaries | History | 19 | 35,19% |
| Archeology | Historical monuments | 18 | 66,67% |
| A region | History | 17 | 44,74% |
| Towns or cities | History | 16 | 80,00% |
| Legends and beliefs | Sanctuaries | 14 | 56,00% |
| Villages and population centers | Sanctuaries | 14 | 51,85% |
| Archeology | History | 12 | 44,40% |
| Architecture | History | 11 | 57,89% |
| A religion or a cult | A region | 11 | 36,67% |
| Legends and beliefs | A region | 10 | 40,00% |

**Appendix 5. The approaches to religion in articles dealing with places or regions**




a. Nature sanctuaries
b. Holy stones
c. The relationship between heathen faith and Orthodoxy
d. Rituals
E. Symbols
f. Local religion
g. Chapels
h. Finno-Ugric religion
i. Magic
j. Archaistic elements
k. Sacrificial gifts
l. Funeral practices